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## YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

A \$1.50 subscription will bring you the Yosemite story accurately and interestingly told twelve times a year.

Revenue derived from the activities of the Yosemite Natural History Association is devoted entirely to assisting the park naturalist division in the furtherance of research and the interpretation of the natural and human story in Yosemite National Park.

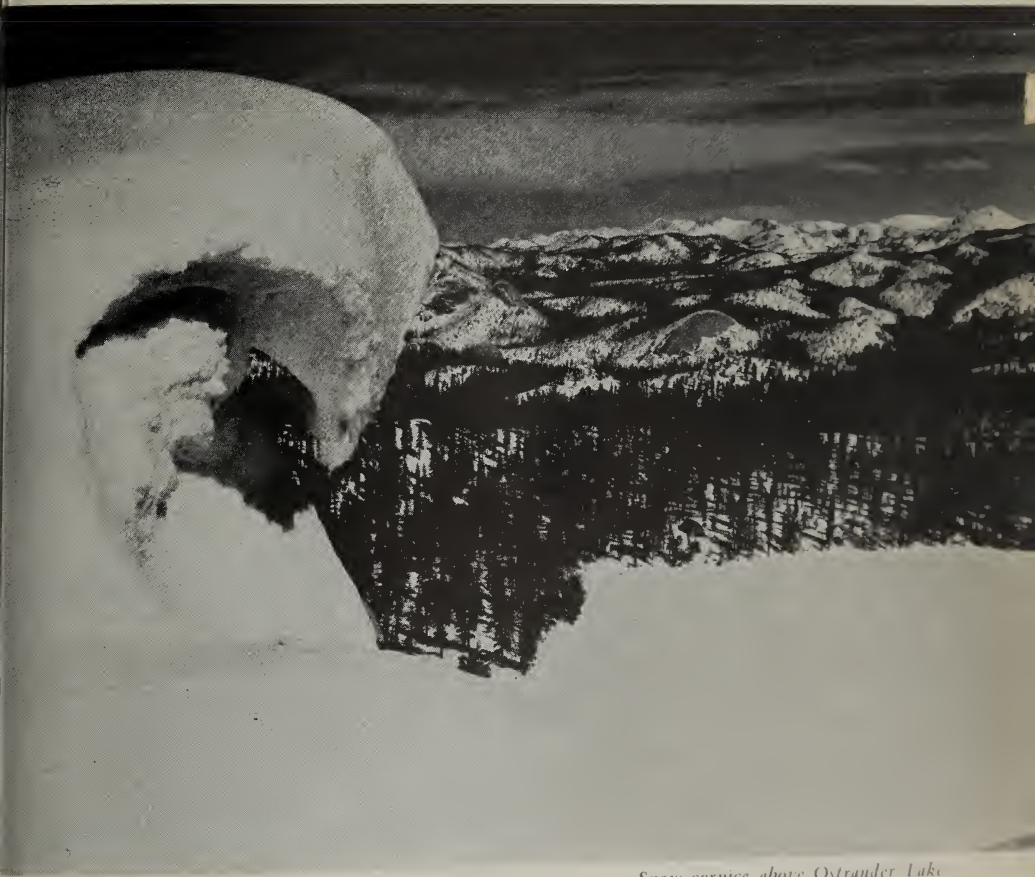
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BOX 545, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, CALIFORNIA

# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

VOLUME XXXIV • NUMBER 2

FEBRUARY 1955



*Snow cornice above Ostrander Lake  
—Ralph Anderson*

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# Yosemite Nature Notes

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF  
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DIVISION AND  
THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION, INC.

John C. Preston, Superintendent  
D. H. Hubbard, Assoc. Park Naturalist

D. E. McHenry, Park Naturalist  
W. V. Bryant, Junior Park Naturalist

VOL. XXXIV

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## 1954 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT IN YOSEMITE VALLEY

By W. J. and Erma Fitzpatrick

The annual Christmas Count taken in and adjacent to Yosemite National Park between El Portal, elevation 2,000 feet, and Mirror Lake, elevation 4,000 feet, was conducted on December 29, 1954, under ideal weather conditions. Clear skies, no wind, and mild temperatures ranged from 25° to 68°, with snow being encountered only at upper elevations in shaded areas.

Fifteen participants, working in four parties, recorded sixty species and subspecies with about 3,006 individuals, thus assuring the most successful count yet obtained in the Yosemite National Park area. As customary, the larger numbers of both species and individuals were seen at lower elevations in the vicinity of El Portal. The most interesting observations were those of unusually numerous band-tailed pigeons and varied thrushes in Yosemite Valley, and of two rufous-crowned sparrows and a number of white-throated swifts near El Portal.

The detailed count follows: Great Blue Heron—1; Cooper's Hawk—3; Red-tailed Hawk—8; Golden Eagle—3; Sparrow Hawk—2; Mountain Quail—6; Band-tailed Pigeon—414; Mourning Dove—3; Pygmy Owl—1; White-throated Swift—58; Anna Hummingbird—2; Belted Kingfisher—7; Red-shafted Flicker—13; Acorn Woodpecker—74; Red-naped Sapsucker—1; Red-breasted Sapsucker

—3; Hairy Woodpecker—5; Downy Woodpecker—2; Nuttall's Woodpecker—1; White-headed Woodpecker—5; Black Phoebe—8; Say's Phoebe—1; Steller's Jay—246; Scrub Jay—38; Mountain Chickadee—80; Plain Titmouse—16; Common Bush-tit—40; White-breasted Nuthatch—19; Red-breasted Nuthatch—24; Brown Creeper—17; Wren-tit—10; Ouzel—20; House Wren—1; Winter Wren—1; Bewick Wren—3; Canyon Wren—16; Western Robin—53; Varied Thrush—86; Hermit Thrush—11; Western Bluebird—83; Townsend's Solitaire—3; Golden-crowned Kinglet—371; Ruby-crowned Kinglet—23; Audubon's Warbler—4; House Sparrow—16; Purple Finch—53; House Finch—274; Pine Siskin—25; Lesser Goldfinch—13; Spotted Towhee—80; Brown Towhee—174; Lark Sparrow—300; Rufous-crowned Sparrow—2; Slate-colored Junco—3; Oregon Junco—170; Gambel's Sparrow—7; Golden-crowned Sparrow—94; Fox Sparrow—4; Lincoln's Sparrow—1; Song Sparrow—4.

The following persons took part in the count: Erma and W. J. Fitzpatrick, Dana Morgenson, Mrs. Mary C. Tresidder, Mrs. M. Augsburg, Rev. and Mrs. Owen Hutchison, Marguerite Radigan, Virgena Kohler, Norman Herkenham, Douglass and Hoppy Hubbard, Mary Lou and Ginny Ann Sturm, and Bruce McHenry.

## BOARD HOLDS ANNUAL MEETING

The Board of Trustees of the Yosemite Natural History Association, under whose auspices *Yosemite Nature Notes* is published, held its annual meeting in the Yosemite Museum the evening of January 28. Re-elected were Sterling S. Cramer, Chairman, and James Taylor, Treasurer. Members of the Board for 1955, in addition to Mr. Cramer, are Virginia Adams, Harthorn L. Bill, Walter J. Fitzpatrick and Dana Morgenson. The park naturalist continues as Director and the associate park naturalist as Business Manager and Secretary of the Association.

Among the more important accomplishments of the Association during 1954 were extensive work on the revisions of special issues of *Yosemite Nature Notes* on fishes, wildflowers, mammals, and *A Guide to the Mother Lode Country*, all of which are nearing completion. An entirely new

special issue, *Birds of Yosemite*, by Dr. R. C. Stebbins of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, was produced. This was mailed to subscribers as the August issue and becomes the latest addition to the Association's publications.

The Association purchased a Pen-tron tape recorder for recording interviews with old-timers on the early history of this region and related uses. One hundred fifty thousand and summer naturalist programs were provided through Association funds and were again authorized for the summer of 1955. \$309.85 was contributed to the research library of the Yosemite Museum to purchase 32 new books, for rebinding a number of old books as well as current periodicals, for the purchase of periodicals and microfilms of newspapers of former mining towns of the region having a bearing on our local history.

The Board authorized an advance for 1000 copies of Lewis W. Clark's *Pocket Guide and Trail Guide to the South Country of Yosemite National Park*, the third and last of a series of high-country guides. An additional section will be purchased for the card index cabinet in the research library. The Association will continue to assist with the junior nature program which was started last summer.

Funds to support this ambitious program are derived solely from the sales of publications and some personal donations. Monthly issues of *Yosemite Nature Notes* continue to be published at a loss, \$539.02 for 1954, and are subsidized from other Association funds. At the close of 1954 there were 999 subscribers, a membership which could and should be more than doubled through sub-



Sterling S. Cramer

scribers' promotion among their friends. This would put *Yosemite Nature Notes* on a self-sustaining basis.

Gross income from sale of books and publications during the past year was \$12,537.40, net income \$3292.59. General expenses totalled \$1283.82, giving the Association a net profit of \$2008.77. The cost of service operations—printing of summer naturalist programs

(\$762.20), etc.—totalled \$1839.62, giving a net addition to net worth of \$444.85.

The Yosemite Natural History Association continues effective in its services to the interpretative program of the naturalist division through the sincere interest of the members of its Board of Directors and its many friends in and out of the National Park Service.

D.E.M.

### YOSEMITE'S LA BREA

By Douglass H. Hubbard, Associate Park Naturalist

The first report was from a visitor who claimed to have seen quantities of smoke rising from a swampy area near the fish hatchery at Happy Isles. Incredible as this seemed, Electrical Supervisor Lloyd Seasholtz and his assistant, Walter Gann, walked the 2300-volt power line the same day, to determine if the phenomenon might be caused by an electrical discharge. Finding nothing, they dispatched a crew the following morning to walk all of the lines in the vicinity, but their report was likewise negative.

The home of Bill Overton, Fish Hatcheryman, is immediately behind the hatchery, and it seemed to him that the horse meat they had been getting for fish food was particularly strong (a couple of weeks had now elapsed.) He finally realized that the odor was present even when he was to the leeward of the meat room. His curiosity aroused, Overton put on hip boots and set out across the swampy area in the direction from which the odor was coming. Seeing the bodies of several large animals lying across a downed guy wire from a pole, he lost no time in notifying the electrical department again, and men were sent immediately to the scene. In eliminating the short circuit they learned that an

insulator near the top of the pole had an invisible crack which broke it completely in two, yet it was held together by the wire. This permitted an arc to occur under certain conditions, yet a good ground did not develop since the guy wire extended to and around the base of a tree a foot or more above the surface of the water of the swamp.

An investigation of the electrocuted animals near or across the downed guy wire showed that there was one old buck deer, two yearling bears, and a coyote, all more or less in a heap. We will never know exactly what transpired, but a reasonable explanation could be that the old deer happened along and touched the guy wire as the cracked insulator was arcing, either with his antlers or nose, causing a good ground to occur through his body into the swamp, and bringing his career to an abrupt end. The bears and the coyote probably were drawn by the odor of the cooking meat, and met their fate in the same manner, assuming that the body of the deer was across the guy wire, keeping it in the water. The attraction of food, which doubtless caused many animals to become entrapped in the tars of La Brea, thus has a modern parallel in Yosemite.



## YOSEMITE EARTHQUAKES

By Donald E. McHenry, Chief Park Naturalist

"A noble earthquake! A noble earthquake" shouted John Muir as he ran out of his cabin in Yosemite Valley very early in the morning of March 26, 1872. He felt sure he "was going to learn something. The shocks were so violent and varied, and succeeded one another so closely, that I had to balance myself in walking as if on the deck of ship among waves, and it seemed impossible that the high cliffs of the Valley could escape being shattered . . . It was a calm moonlight night, and no sound was heard for the first minute or so, save low, muffled, underground, bubbling rumblings, and the whisper of agitated trees, as if nature were holding her breath. Then suddenly, out of the strange silence and strange motion, there came a tremendous roar. The Eagle Rock on the south wall, about half a mile up the Valley, gave way and I saw it falling in thousands of the great boulders I had so long been studying, pouring into the Valley floor in a free curve luminous from friction, making a terribly sublime spectacle . . . There was no swaying, waving or swirling (of the trees) as in windstorms, but quick, quivering jerks, and at times the heavy tassled branches moved as if they had all been pressed down against the trunk and suddenly let go, to spring up and vibrate until they came to rest again. Only the owls seemed undisturbed."

This was the Great Inyo earthquake which wrought havoc on the town of Lone Pine in the Owens Valley. A. Johnson of Lone Pine reported it to J. M. Hutchins: "At the beginning (about 2 a.m.) houses

swayed, then cracked, then fell. Twenty-seven persons were killed and about sixty were injured. The canyons near the Sierras were filled with debris, rolling rocks, broken trees, and dust . . . Shocks continued, five or six a night, then lessened to two, then to one, then two or three a week, and kept thus for nearly a year . . . The earth was cracked, sunken, and lodged for a hundred miles . . . Lone Pine the disturbed ground was 1/4 mile wide, 12 feet deep, and 10 miles long . . . the earth was twisted up into hills and hollows (and the) Owen River was turned 10 miles across the valley and a lake formed." Some believe that the large and relatively deep earthquake crack seen on the mountain slope as one travels from Mammoth Lake to the Devils Postpile National Monument on the east escarpment of the Sierra is evidence of this 1872 earthquake.

The Inyo earthquake was neither the first nor last earthquake in the Yosemite region. Such disturbances were (most certainly) a part of the mountain-making movement of the earth's crust in this area and doubtless many were extremely violent. It is not surprising, however, that today one can be lulled into thinking of such earthquakes as phenomena of the past. That this is untrue is evidenced by quakes of various intensities in and near Yosemite during recent years. Of these the most significant was that of December 1, 1954.

At 3:07 PST in the morning of the day, a number of Yosemite Valley residents were awakened by an earthquake of greater intensity than



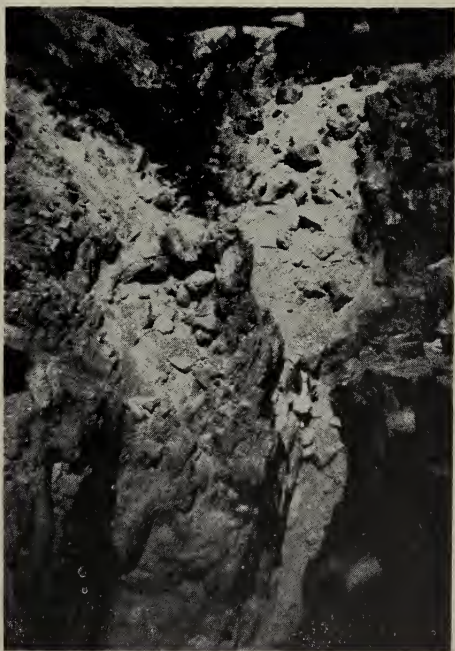
ny felt for years. It was accompanied by rumbling noises although the creaking of frame buildings all but drowned out these sounds for the occupants. Two peaks of activities were reached, one at 3:08 and one at 3:10, after which tremors were felt in diminishing intensity until around 3:30 a.m., and were still discernable around 6:00 a.m. At its height a circular, heaving motion was evident. This earthquake had its epicenter near Fallon, Nevada, at 39°31'N latitude, 118°00'W longitude. Dr. William K. Cloud, Chief, Seismological Field Survey, U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Department of Commerce, writes, "Professor David B. Slemmons (University of Nevada) reports . . . 'have examined many areas with 6 to 8 feet vertical movement along with 12 feet of right lateral movement . . . at several points vertical movement exceeded 20 feet. At Mud Springs, located 30 miles north of U. S. Highway 50 in Dixie Valley on the eastern slope of the Stillwater Mountains, the flow of water increased many times. Magnitude of the earthquake on the Gutenberg-Richter scale . . . was in the range 6-3/4 to 7-1/4. Magnitude of the San Francisco earthquake in 1906 was about 7-1/4." According to Dr. B. Gutenberg, the Inyo earthquake of 1872 had an intensity "at least equal to the 8-1/4 of the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, and probably greater."

With this report of the intensity of the December 16th earthquake it is logical to expect minor damage in Yosemite. The walls of some buildings in Yosemite Valley were cracked, in one case enough to require repairs. The separation of a wall from the masonry of the fireplace was reported in one home. In the local general store canned goods, sacks of flour and glass con-

tainers of honey, preserves and liquor fell from the shelves, some breaking. Water mains serving Glacier Point became disjointed and service was interrupted. This latter required expensive snow removal over ten miles of high country road to allow workmen to repair the damage.

A most curious phenomenon was the breaking up of the ice at the ice-skating rink near Camp Curry in Yosemite Valley, reducing the ice to a mass of squares, none larger than 12". Noteworthy was the apparent absence of rock slides from the valley walls, certainly none like those reported by Muir in 1872.

Whether we concern ourselves with such earthquakes as described by John Muir, the less intense one of December 16, or the many minor tremors occurring over the years, all are sufficient evidence that geologic activities in the Sierra are not a thing of the past.



—Verett

*Earthquake rift (1872?) near  
Devils Postpile National Monument.*

**NORMAN B. HERKENHAM TRANSFERS TO YELLOWSTONE****By Donald E. McHenry**

Norman B. Herkenham, Assistant Park Naturalist in Yosemite National Park since April 1950, has transferred to Yellowstone National Park. He assumed his new duties as Associate Park Naturalist the middle of February. Prior to his departure, Norm devoted his time to preparation of a special *Yosemite Nature Notes* issue entitled *Sbrubs of Yosemite*. The high quality of the monthly issues of Nature Notes is a reflection of his skill and devotion to editing this publication.

A native of Oakland, California, Mr. Herkenham first studied architecture, then forestry, receiving his bachelor's degree from the University of California in 1940. His post-graduate work was interrupted by the war but was completed in 1947 with a master's degree in zoology from the University.

Mr. Herkenham entered the U. S. Naval Reserve in 1941 and saw active duty in the Pacific theater until 1945, serving on minesweepers. He was released from active duty as a full lieutenant.

Norm began his National Park Service career as a park ranger at the Shasta Lake Recreational Area in June 1947. The following year he was transferred to Yosemite National Park, and served first as a ranger in the Hetch Hetchy District. He was in charge of the South Entrance Station from May 1949 to April 1950, when he was promoted to Assistant Park Naturalist.

A graduate of the class of 1941 of the Yosemite Field School, his interests in natural history developed from his experiences at the Oakland Boy Scout Camp near Mather, which



*Norman B. Herkenham*

afforded him his first opportunity to become familiar with the Yosemite area.

In 1942 Norm married Marjorie Watson of Lodi, California. A graduate in geology from the University of California, like her husband she attended the Yosemite Field School class of 1948. Mrs. Herkenham has given piano recitals in Yosemite and has been active as a piano teacher. The Herkenhams have two children, Alice Lee, age 8, and Miles, 5.

While we regret losing a family which has made a distinct place for themselves in the Yosemite community, we wish them every success and happiness in their new assignment in Yellowstone.



## SHE PHOTOGRAPHED THE HIGHWAYMAN

EDITOR'S NOTE: The accompanying photograph of an actual highway robbery taking place has been published on several occasions in *Yosemite Nature Notes*. Recently the issue of *Foley's Yosemite Tourist* for Sunday, March 17, 1908, reporting the circumstances surrounding the taking of this picture was brought to our attention by Mrs. Claire Healy Hartley of Laguna Beach, California. We believe our readers will enjoy the account as much as we have it is reprinted in its entirety. We are indebted to Mrs. Hartley for presenting this valuable issue of the *Tourist* to the Yosemite Museum.



During the month of August, of last season, one of the Raymond stages was held up at a point about three miles up the grade, this side of Awahnee.

Walter Farnsworth of Mariposa, a trusted employee of the stage company, was the driver.

Among the passengers was Miss Agnes Wilkinson of West Philadelphia, a teacher in the Landreth Grammar school. With the young lady at the time were her sister and her mother.

Miss Wilkinson is the only young woman in the world with a photograph of a real stage robber to her credit.

"He seemed to be a rather nice young man," said Miss Wilkinson to a *Tourist* reporter, the day following the event, here in the valley. Through the holes in his mask I could see his eyes. They were fine, great blue eyes, and he had such a lovely, soft voice."

"It all happened about two o'clock in the afternoon of a hot August day, on the westerly slope of the Chowchilla Mountain, overlooking the beautiful Awahnee Valley and hotel.

"The robber had posted himself behind a rock at a bend of the road so that he had to climb up a steep grade to get to the point. When our four horses had strained and toiled



up this grade the driver pulled them up to rest them a bit. It was then that the robber stepped out from behind a big boulder and quick as a flash drew a gun and leveled it at our heads. He called out sternly, 'Get down out of that stage, every man of you but the driver.'

"In our part of the stage were two men, a German tourist and A. G. Veith, Austrian Consul at Milwaukee. When the men did not move the robber shouted: 'Get down! Get down. I tell you! Get down or I'll open up!'

"Better get down in the road,' the driver counseled. It was then the men began to get out into the road. The women got up in the seats. 'Sit down, you women,' the highwayman said very distinctly. They sat down.

"In the meantime,' said the young lady, 'we women had been sitting watching with all our eyes. I hid our three purses in my blouse, keeping out a small purse with only a few dollars in it, for the robber to find.'

"Finally the highwayman stood the men up in a row again, with their hands behind their backs, their backs toward the stage. He walked over to us and demanded our valuables.

"I remember the highwayman seemed disappointed in the small amount of money he got from us. One of the purses was hard to open, and he just dropped it into his bag. The others he examined. Then he said: 'Say, I believe you women have more money. I don't think you would come into the park with so little.' We answered, 'We heard there were fellows like you, and that's why we left it.' But I thought

he might make another search and slipped the three purses out of my blouse and gave them to the driver on the sly. The driver dropped them in his pocket. Sure enough, he did make another search, but he did not find the purses. All of us lost something. The haul altogether might have been \$300.'

"It was just when the robber was walking off that the picture idler came to me. Mr. Veith did the most to get it. 'You can let us have your picture. You can certainly do that much,' said Mr. Veith.

"I guess my makeup is all right," the robber said. And he glanced through the holes in the mask down at the clothes and old linen dust he wore. Then he nodded his head toward us and said, 'All right; go ahead.' This part of it was a small matter—just pressing a button.

"Stand still,' was the call.

"The robber stood still, posing like a good fellow, and snap, it was all over."

The daring robber made good his escape. No doubt but he was quite familiar with the surrounding country. During the following month, the stage running from San Mateo to Half Moon Bay, south of San Francisco, was held up by a lone highwayman, his work and general description agreeing with that of the bandit of the Yosemite road. It is quite amusing to hear men say what they would do in a hold-up like this. The simple fact is, that if the robber held the trump card they would throw up their hands like brave men. To do so is no sign of cowardice at all. It is the only safe thing to do under the circumstances. To do otherwise is to risk your own life as well as that of others.



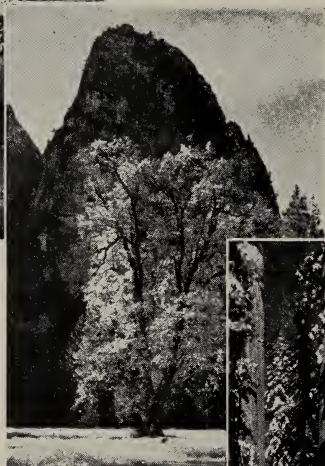
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